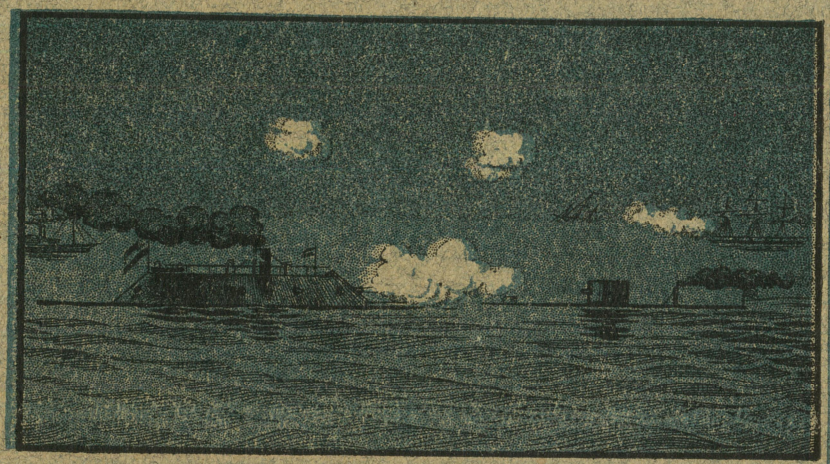
SOUVENIR

The FIRST IRON CLAD NAVAL ENGAGEMENT in the WORLD

History of Facts of the great Naval Battle



Between

The MERRIMAC-VIRGINIA
C. S. N.
and
The ERICSSON MONITOR
U. S. N.

HAMPTON ROADS
MARCH 8 & 9, 1862

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The First Iron-Clad Naval Engagement in the World

HISTORY OF FACTS OF
THE GREAT NAVAL BATTLE
BETWEEN
THE MERRIMAC-VIRGINIA, *C. S. N.*
AND
THE ERICSSON MONITOR, *U. S. N.*

Hampton Roads,
March 8 and 9, 1862.

BY

E. V. WHITE, Portsmouth, Virginia,
Late of Georgia.

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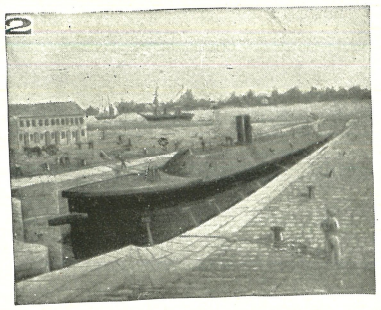
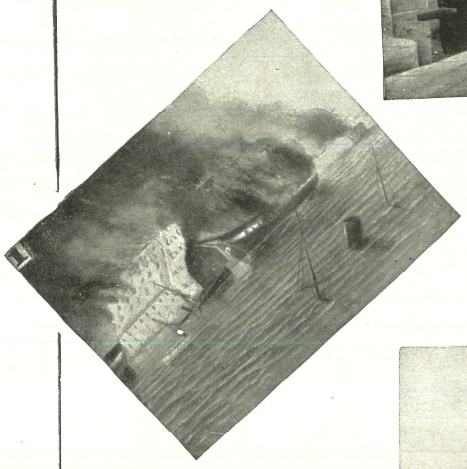
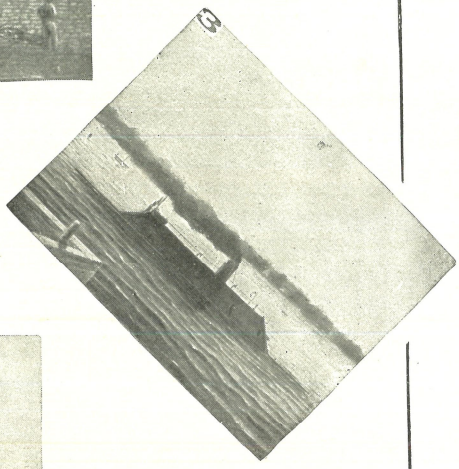
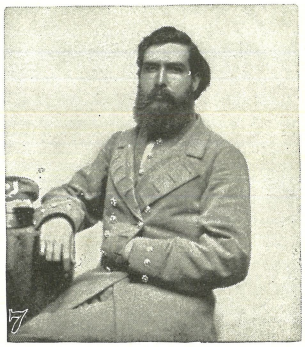
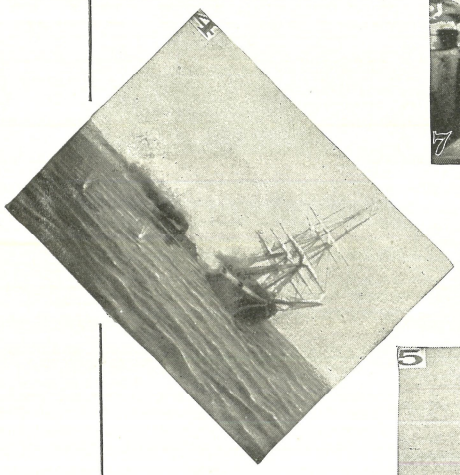
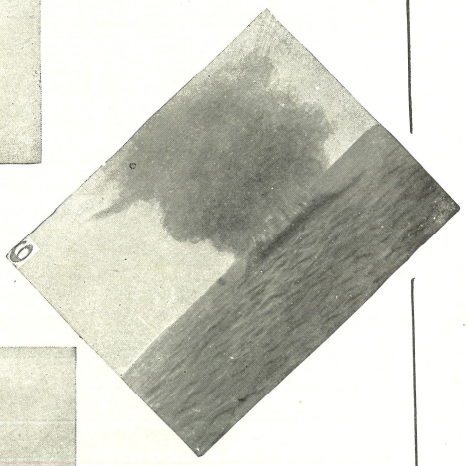


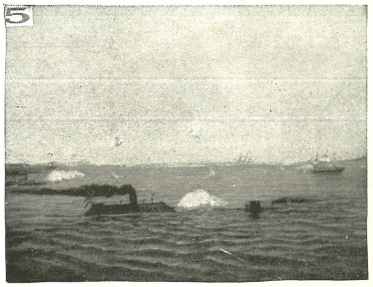












1. "Merrimac" destroyed at the burning of the Norfolk Navy Yard, April 19th, 1861.
2. "Merrimac" in dry dock, being converted into the iron battery "Virginia."
3. "Virginia" passing Fort Norfolk, March 8th, 1862.
4. "Virginia" sinking the "Cumberland," March 8th, 1862.
5. "Virginia" engaged in battle with the "Monitor," in Hampton Roads, March 9th, 1862.
6. Destruction of the "Virginia," May 11th, 1862.
7. E. V. White, of Engineer Corps, in Confederate Naval uniform, taken February 25th, 1862.

The above views (Nos. 1-6) are taken from original oil paintings by Mr. B. A. Richardson, of Norfolk, Va.

Foreword.

WERE the present a period of war between the States, the reader could readily appreciate the occasion for this publication. In that event, the novelty of the new instrument of destruction—the Iron-Clad—would intensely interest the military student, and the skill and courage manifested by the combatants would stir the enthusiasm and call forth the patriotism of the reader.

This is, however, an era not of strife, but of peace. It is a time of goodwill. No conflict between the sections now exists. The former foemen are brethren. The alarms and woes of battle have all passed away. Peace smiles upon a united people, and hallows the Star Spangled Banner, the common flag of an undismembered country and an unruptured union.

What, under such conditions, is the propriety of a discussion like the present? Certainly we do not purpose breeding discord between the lately contending communities.

As citizens of a government which has aptly and happily been described as an "indissoluble union of indestructible States" we may contemplate historic battles of our Civil War as most impressive manifestations of the patriotism, valor and wonderful resources of the participants therein. And in a recital of their details we can find something to inspire love of country and admiration for and confidence in the communities that make up the composite people of our great nation.

The principal value of my book is that I purpose stating what occurred under my own observation, and my description of this historic naval engagement will be the story of both a witness and a participant. As far as opportunity made me a competent witness, and my memory has preserved the integrity of the facts, the description will be trustworthy.

I have introduced in my description some elements that are personal to myself, which seemed to me to add to the value of the statement—in some measure to be necessary to it.

My command, the City Light Guard, of Columbus, Ga., arrived in Portsmouth, Va., Monday morning, April 21st, 1861. The Navy Yard was burned and destroyed April 19th, two days before our arrival. We were quartered at the Naval Hospital, and on the day of arrival I visited the Navy Yard and there looked upon the smoking, smouldering remains of the "Merrimac," upon whose hull was subsequently erected the great naval wonder of the world, the Iron-Clad "Virginia." That you may more intelligently consider the subject of this issue, I give, briefly, the history, dimensions and other particulars of this famous ship.

THE AUTHOR.

HISTORY

OF THE

WORLD-FAMOUS BATTLESHIP

"Merrimac-Virginia,"

1855-1862.

A PERSONAL REMINISCENCE.

THE U. S. S. "Merrimac" was a steam frigate. Her hull was built at Boston, Mass., her engines at Cold Springs, N. Y., and she was placed in commission in 1855. Early in 1856 she was officered and manned with a crew of 650 specially selected men, with an armament of 60 guns. She was considered to represent the best type of war-ship then known, and was sent to European waters as a specimen of the finest naval architecture then afloat, and from reports of her royal entertainment abroad she unquestionably proved to be all that the United States Government had claimed for her. Returning after a four years' successful cruise, she was put out of commission at the Portsmouth, Va., Navy Yard, and upon the evacuation of Norfolk and Portsmouth, April 19th, 1861, this ship, with others, was dismantled and burned to the water-line. After mature consideration the Confederate authorities determined to raise the "Merrimac," and upon her hull construct a powerful battery for the protection of Norfolk harbor and the mouth of the James River. Upon plans supplied by a Virginian the work of construction proceeded until its completion.

The "Virginia," as she was afterwards named, was covered amidships with a roof 170 feet long, built at an angle of 45 degrees, constructed of 20-inch heart pine, and covered with 4-inch oak. Upon this wood backing there were two iron plates two inches thick and seven inches wide, one laid horizontally and the other vertically, making the armament four inches thick. These plates were bolted through the wood and clinched on the inside. Her bow was armed below water with a cast-iron prow about 6 feet long, to be used as a ram. Her weakest element was her motive power, her old engines and boilers having already been condemned. Her ordnance consisted of ten guns: two 7-inch steel-banded Brooke rifles, mounted as pivot guns at the bow and stern; two 6-inch rifles of the same pattern,

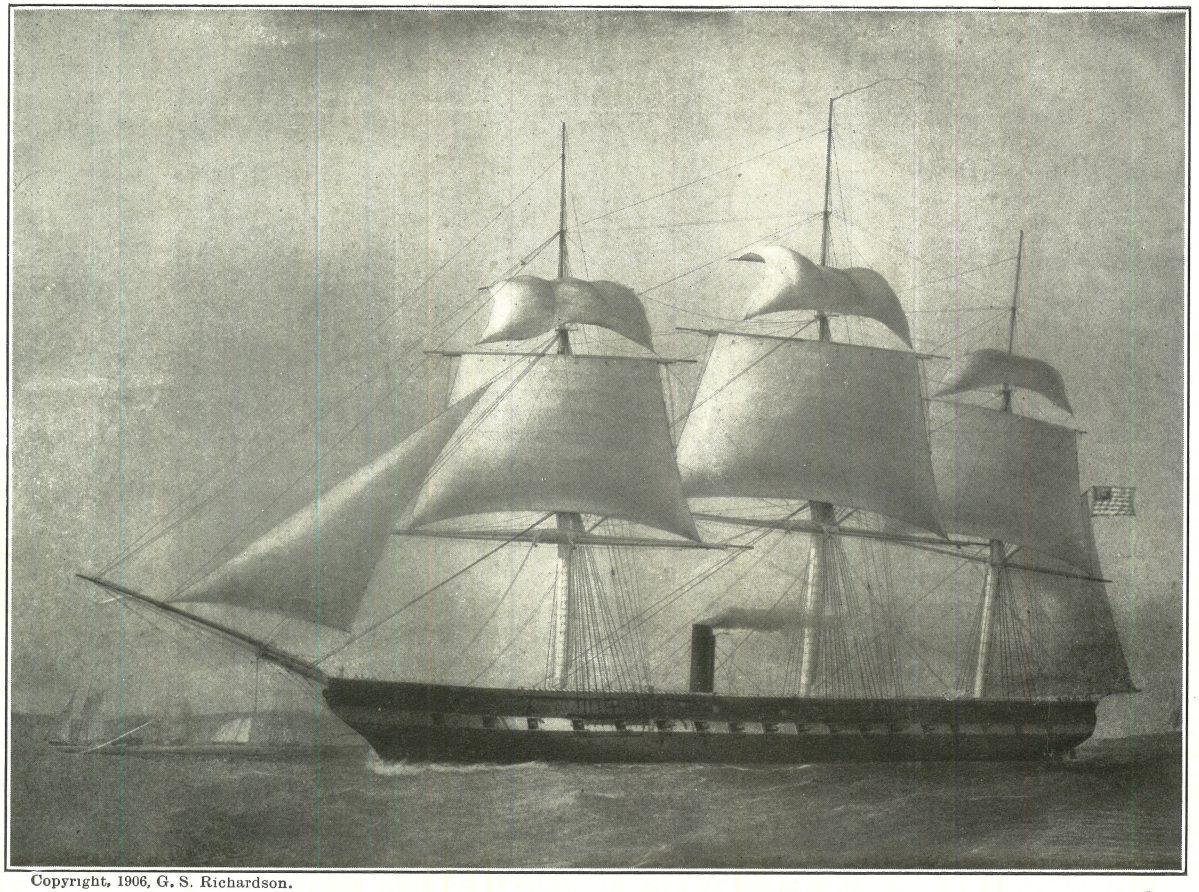
and six 9-inch Dahlgren smooth-bore broadside guns. Her commander was Commodore Franklin Buchanan, one of the bravest and ablest officers of the old service. Her second in command was Lieut. Catesby Ap. R. Jones, distinguished both for ability and great gallantry. Her crew numbered 350, most of whom had volunteered from the army for the occasion, and the emergencies of the service allowed little time for either testing her engines or drilling her crew.

Early in December, '61, I conceived the idea of becoming one of the number who should test the qualities of this mighty engine of destruction. I made application for the position desired, received my appointment, January 16th, 1862, and two days thereafter reported for duty. Thenceforth, until her tragic end, the "Virginia" was my companion, and I watched her growth and completion, and all the stirring incidents in her brief but wonderful career, with a profound interest.

My position was that of junior engineer, and I was placed on the gun-deck in charge of the engine-room gong and the speaking-tube, by means of which the engineers on duty could be reached. Commodore Buchanan and Chief Engineer Ramsey termed me their aide, and as such I conveyed all orders from the officers in charge to the engine-room, both for the working of the engines and the sending of hot shot to the gun-deck. I ask pardon for thus alluding to myself, but find such reference necessary that you may understand the ground upon which I claim more than ordinary facilities for observing the events that characterized this memorable battle, having five port-holes for observation.

Finally the great ship was reported ready for duty, and well do I remember the words that fell from the lips of our commander, Commodore Buchanan, who had but recently taken charge—his words completely offsetting several well-circulated reports then current regarding both himself and the ship. He told us not to mistrust him; that he intended to do his duty, and expected the same from one and all on board. (I allude to the report concerning the possible conduct of the two brothers now soon to meet in deadly battle, and the statement that the concussion of the shots would deafen all on board our ship. Commodore Buchanan's brother was an officer on the U. S. S. Cumberland.)

At, or about, 12 o'clock M., March 8th, 1862, the "Virginia" cast loose from the wharf at the Navy Yard and steamed slowly to the work of the day, passing down Elizabeth River, saluted by our batteries and cheered by the citizens and soldiers, who lined every available point on both sides of the river to witness the initial engagement of this new idea war-ship, the result of which was eagerly awaited by the whole world; for never had there been a bolder attack than was about to be made that day. Passing



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U. S. "Auxiliary Screw" Steam Frigate "Merrimac," 60 Guns.

through the obstruction at Craney Island, she headed directly for Newport News, where the U. S. S. "Cumberland" and U. S. S. "Congress" lay riding at anchor, blockading James River. The day was beautifully calm and clear, and nothing in the tranquil scene gave indication of the mortal and bloody conflict soon to be enacted. Ere she reached these ships several large Men-of-War started from Old Point to the help of their sister ships; among them the "Minnesota," which grounded near Newport News point. The "Congress" was the first to fire, with a full broadside, upon our ship, followed by the "Cumberland," and from the latter's shot the hog chain was parted and driven back into our ship, killing one man and wounding several others. Every available Federal gun that could be brought to bear on the "Virginia" opened fire. Reserving her fire until within easy range, the "Virginia's" bow rifle was used with terrible effect; and, as has been frequently stated, opened a hole in the "Cumberland" large enough for a horse and cart to drive through. We made directly for the latter vessel. When at probably fifty yards distance, with slackened speed, but with determined purpose, we moved on towards the gallant ship, and struck her the deadly blow, but with little jar to the "Virginia," backing our engines at once until we had cleared the disabled vessel. A shot from the "Congress" struck the muzzle of one of our broadside 9-inch Dahlgren guns, breaking off about two feet of it, killing one man and wounding a few others. Reversing our engines we passed the "Cumberland," which, though now sinking, was bravely fighting her guns and exhibiting a heroism worthy of all praise, and which entitled her to the renown that has since that day been attached to her name.

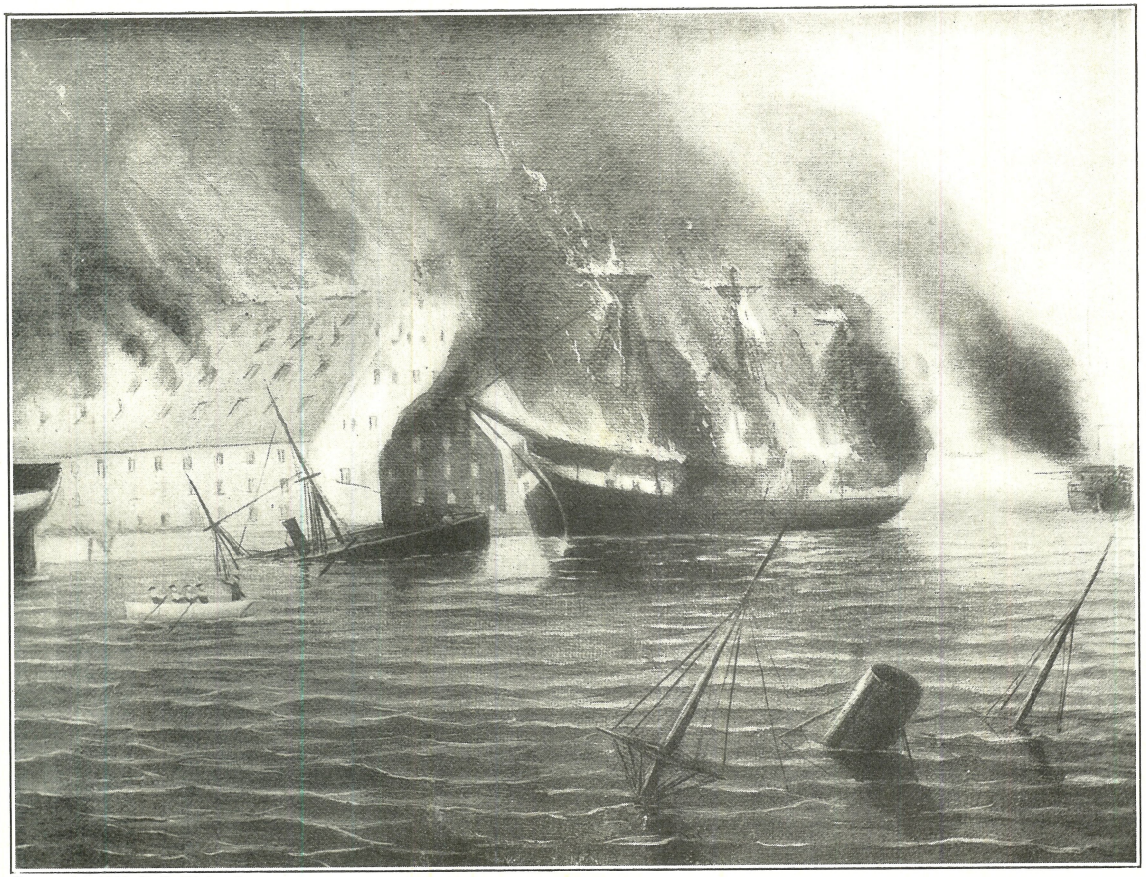
We then moved up the James River to a place of easy turning for our ship, and started back, being joined in the meantime by the James River fleet, consisting of several steamers. Then, with probably one hundred guns firing upon us from various points, we came within two hundred yards of the now grounded "Congress," upon which we opened fire. After we had delivered several well-directed shots that sent disaster to that ship, and many souls to their eternal home, she (the "Congress") hoisted the white flag, and all firing ceased. Arrangements were then commenced for receiving the surrender and removing the dead and wounded from both the enemy's ship and our own. While our officers were aboard the "Congress," and many on the upper deck of the "Virginia," exposed because of the Federals' white flag—which was a signal for help—being displayed, the enemy opened fire from the shore battery upon us, wounding many, amongst them Commodore Buchanan, shot through the thigh, and Lieut. Minor, shot through the side. Our boats were ordered to clear the "Congress," and Commodore Buchanan turned the command of our ship over to

Lieut. Catesby Ap. R. Jones, instructing him to set fire to the "Congress." I received orders for three hot shot, and soon that vessel was in flames. The "Cumberland," the while, had gone down beneath the waters of the James, taking with her in that awful plunge many who had gallantly remained at their posts of duty.

It being now nearly dark, and the work of transferring the dead and wounded, to be conveyed to the naval hospital, being completed, we steamed over to the buoy at Sewell's Point, and came to anchor for the night. As I was one of the unfortunate ones placed on first watch, I had very little rest, but was fully compensated for the performance of this arduous duty by witnessing the grand and impressive sight of the explosion of the "Congress" later in the night—a scene too solemnly beautiful to attempt to describe.

It will increase your interest in this connection to know the estimate of the first day's fight of the "Virginia" by our adversaries, and to be informed of the panic created at the North. I beg leave, therefore, to introduce several statements. First, regarding the impression at Washington and the North, relative to the battle, as described in the letter of a Washington correspondent:

> "The swift work done by the 'Merrimac' on this occasion spread consternation throughout the Northern States. The blockade of the Atlantic Coast maintained at that time could not last long before this mighty and invulnerable engine of destruction. New York, Boston and Washington would soon be threatened. The most alarming crisis of the Civil War was at hand. As the sun went down that night over Hampton Roads every Union heart in the fleet and in the fortress throbbed with despair. There was no gleam of hope. The 'Merrimac' was impervious to balls, and could go where she pleased. In the morning, it would be easy work for her to destroy our whole fleet. She could then shell Newport News and Fortress Monroe at her leisure, setting everything combustible in flames, and driving every man from the guns. As the news of the terrible disaster was flashed over the country by the telegraph wires all faces wore an expression of consternation. The writer was in Washington at the time. Congress was in session. The panic cannot be described. There was absolutely nothing to prevent the 'Merrimac' from ascending the Potomac and laying the capital in ashes, providing there was sufficient depth of water to float the steamer, and no one knew whether there was this depth or not, for no one knew the draft of the 'Merrimac.' Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Boston and Portland were in a state of terror. 'The 'Merrimac' could laugh at forts,' says Abbott, in his history.



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"Merrimac" Destroyed at the Burning of the Norfolk Navy Yard, April 19, 1861.

"The experiment of an hour had wrought an entire change in naval architecture and in defensive fortifications throughout the world. Wooden frigates had almost ceased to be of any value. The blow which sunk the 'Cumberland' demolished also the fleets of England and France. All navies went down with that frigate into the abyss together. It is not too much to say that such a night of anxiety, of terror, of bewilderment, as followed the triumphant return of the 'Merrimac' to her anchorage behind Craney Island, this world has seldom witnessed before."

Second, the battle as it appeared to an eye-witness who stood upon the shore and within the Federal lines at Old Point. This eye-witness from Fortress Monroe thus touchingly describes the scenes which transpired and the emotions which were excited on that eventful Saturday night:

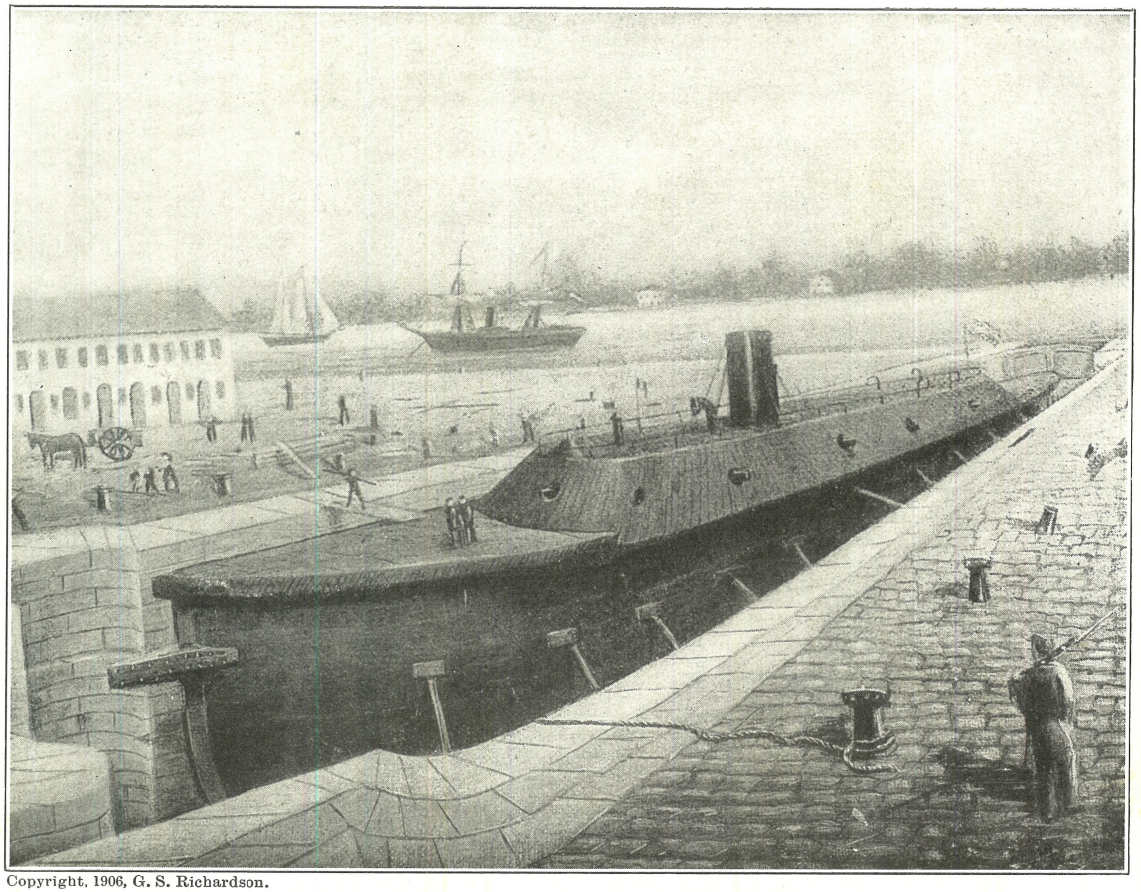
"That morrow! How anxiously we waited for it! How much we feared its results! How anxious our Saturday eve of preparation! At sundown there was nothing to dispute the empire of the seas with the 'Merrimac,' and had a land attack been made by Magruder then, God only knows what our fate would have been. The 'St. Lawrence' and the 'Minnesota' aground and helpless, the 'Roanoke' with a broken shaft—these were our defenses by sea; while on land we were doing all possible to resist a night invasion, but who could hope that these would have much efficiency! Oh! What a night that was; that night I never can forget. There was no fear during its long hours—danger, I find, does not bring that—but there was a longing for some interposition of God and waiting upon Him, from whom we felt our help must come, in earnest, fervent prayer, while not neglecting all the means of martial defense He had placed in our hands. Fugitives from Newport News kept arriving; ladies and children had walked the long ten miles from Newport News, feeling that their presence only embarrassed their brave husbands. Sailors from the 'Congress' and 'Cumberland' came, one of them with his ship's flag bound about his waist, as he had swum with it ashore, determined the enemy should never trail it in dishonor as a trophy. Dusky fugitives, the contrabands, came mournfully fleeing from a fate worse than death—slavery. These entered my cabin hungry and weary, or passed it in long, sad procession. The heavens were aflame with the burning 'Congress.' The hotel was crowded with fugitives, and private hospitality was taxed to the utmost. But there were *no soldiers among the flying host;* all in our camps at Newport News and Camp Hamilton were at the post of duty, undismayed and ready to do all and dare all for their

country. The sailors came only to seek another chance at the enemy, since the bold 'Cumberland' had gone down in the deep waters and the 'Congress' had gone upward, as if a chariot of fire to convey the manly souls, whose bodies had perished in that conflict, upward to heaven. I had lost several friends there; yet not lost, for they are saved who do their duty to their country and their God, as these had done. We did not pray in vain.

"The heavy night hung dark the hills and waters o'er, but the night was not half so heavy as our hearts, nor so dark as our prospects. All at once a speck of light gleamed on the distant wave; it moved; it came nearer and nearer, and at 10 o'clock at night the 'Monitor' appeared. 'When the tale of bricks is doubled, Moses comes!' I never more firmly believed in special providences than at that hour. Even skeptics for the moment were converted, and said: 'God has sent her!' But how insignificant she looked; she was but a speck on the dark blue sea at night, almost a laughable object by day. The enemy called her a 'cheese-box on a raft,' and the comparison is a good one. Could she meet the 'Merrimac?' The morrow must determine, for, under God, the 'Monitor' is our only hope."

Just here, also, permit me to introduce an account by this same eye-witness of the second day's engagement. This account, though written in thrilling words, is not in accordance with the actual facts, as I shall show later on in my own description of this day's fight. He says:

"The 'Merrimac,' in her attempt to run down the 'Monitor,' failed entirely. She struck her antagonist fairly and at full speed, causing, however, but a slight jar. By the collision the prow of the 'Merrimac' was broken and her mail cut through by the sharp edge of the 'Monitor,' causing a bad leak. In the desperation of the fight the ships closed, actually touching sides, hurling shot and shell at each other with demoniac energy. But these cast-iron missiles glanced or crumbled to powder. The rebel 'Yorktown' at once attempted to interfere. A single 170-pound shot from the 'Monitor' passed through the traitor and sent him home to have his wounds bandaged. The contest was for a time so hot, the muzzles of the hostile guns almost touching each other, that both ships were enveloped in a cloud of smoke, which no eye could penetrate. Flash and thunder-roar burst forth incessantly from the tumultuous maelstrom of darkness, and solid balls, weighing 170 pounds, glancing from the armor, ricochetted over the water in all directions for one and two miles. Such bolts were never hurled from the fabled hands of Jupiter Olympus.



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"Merrimac" in Dry Dock, Being Converted into the Iron Battery "Virginia."

"Thus the duel raged with unintermitted fury for four long hours. The 'Monitor,' at but a few yards' distance, steamed around her foe, planting a ball here and a ball there, eagerly searching to find some vital spot. She tried her rudder, her sides, her screw, just above the water line, just below the water line. In some of these efforts she was successful, and at length three gaping holes were visible and the 'Merrimac' was evidently sinking. *The rebel was whipped;* and firing his last gun, turned to run away. Unfortunately, just at that moment, as Lieutenant Worden was looking out at the iron grating of the pilot-house, a 100-pound shot struck point-blank upon the grating, just before his eyes. The concussion knocked him prostrate and for the moment senseless. He was also entirely blinded by the minute fragments of iron and powder driven into his eyes, an injury which it was almost impossible to get over. This occasioned momentary confusion, until the command was assumed by Lieutenant Green. The 'Merrimac,' which had entered the conflict with a spirit so proud and defiant, was now limping on the retreat thoroughly whipped and humiliated. As so much depended upon the single 'Monitor,' it was not deemed wise to expose her to any risks not actually necessary. She had, therefore, received orders to act strictly on the defensive, and by no means to leave the immediate vicinity of the fleet. She, however, pursued her disabled foe a short distance, throwing into her a few parting military benedictions and then left her to seek refuge in her rebel anchorage. As Lieutenant Worden after a time revived from the stunning blow he had received, his first question was: 'Have I saved the "Minnesota"?' 'Yes,' was the reply, 'and whipped the "Merrimac."' 'Then,' he rejoined, 'I care not what becomes of me.'"

The above is miswritten history, and no facts justify such statements; they have misled our country.

The next morning (Sunday, March 9th) after an early breakfast, a consultation was held, the command having devolved on the gallant, able and courageous Catesby Ap. R. Jones, than whom none deserved more honor for bravery and cool daring, and under whose supervision, as executive officer, the construction of the armament of the ship was completed. It was decided to complete the destruction of the now almost abandoned "Minnesota," even while our ship was taking water freely at the opening in her bow, caused from the loss of the cast-iron prow left in the "Cumberland" when we ran into her. Our pumps had been kept busy during the night relieving the ship of water. However, we got under way, making for the "Minnesota," when suddenly we grounded on what is known as the

Middle Ground of Hampton Roads, and there we stuck for a considerable time. But before we had grounded, the "Monitor" was discovered coming out from where the "Minnesota" lay aground, appearing to us, as she has been called, "a cheese-box," or a "tin can on a shingle." It was not long before she was recognized as the Ericsson "Monitor," and we opened fire upon her with our bow-rifle, but with no effect. Straight on she came toward us, and when in good position let loose her heavy guns, giving us a good shaking up. Thus she continued circling around us, and every now and then throwing the heavy missiles against our sides. We, in response, as she passed around, brought every gun aboard our ship to bear upon her. It was now "Greek meeting Greek;" iron against iron. Hundred-pound shot rattled against the mailed and impenetrable sides of the combatants in this tremendous duel and glanced off like hail. Never before had ships met carrying such heavy guns. From both vessels the firing was executed with great rapidity and with equal skill, with but little effect on either side. However, our weak points seemed to be known to the commander of the "Monitor," and so well did he attack these, that soon on the starboard midship, over the outboard delivery, he so bent in our plating that the massive oak timbers were cracked, and from this and the continued ricochet shots of the "Minnesota" considerable concern was beginning to be felt by our commander and all on board. Soon, however, we were relieved, by the moving of our ship, from the position which, for such a trying period, we had occupied. Then, with a settled determination on the part of our commander to run the "Monitor" down, as a last resort, seeing that our shots were ineffective, I was directed to convey to the engine room orders for every man to be at his post. We caught and did run into the "Monitor," and came near running her under the water; not that we struck her exactly at right angles, but with our starboard bow drove against her with a determination of sending her to the bottom, and so near did we come to accomplishing our object that from the ramming, and shot of our rifle gun that blinded her commander, she withdrew to shoal water near the "Minnesota," whence, by reason of our heavy draft, we could not follow—never again to offer or accept battle with the "Virginia." After waiting on the ground of our victory, without any signs of her return, for possibly an hour or more, we steamed up to the Navy Yard, receiving the shouts and huzzas of the thousands of our people who had witnessed our great triumph.

I wish to *emphasize* the facts just related of the *purposed* collision with the "Monitor" and our desire to repeat it, and of her withdrawal from the field, and her refusal then or *thereafter* to engage in battle with the "Virginia," notwithstanding this statement is in positive contradiction of the theory generally accepted at the North, and even published in the school

histories of to-day. An incident on this point will illustrate the prevalence of an incorrect record of the case. Some years ago, when in New York, I visited the cyclorama illustrating this fight, then on exhibition. When, during the course of his lecture on the subject to the spectators, the manager made statements that were not facts, I interrupted him and called his attention to the same. He asked me what I knew about it. I answered that I was an officer on board the "Virginia," and he politely requested an interview with me. After finishing his talk he came to me and said he was well aware of the errors he was circulating, but that in order to make his show *popular* he was forced to state what he did.

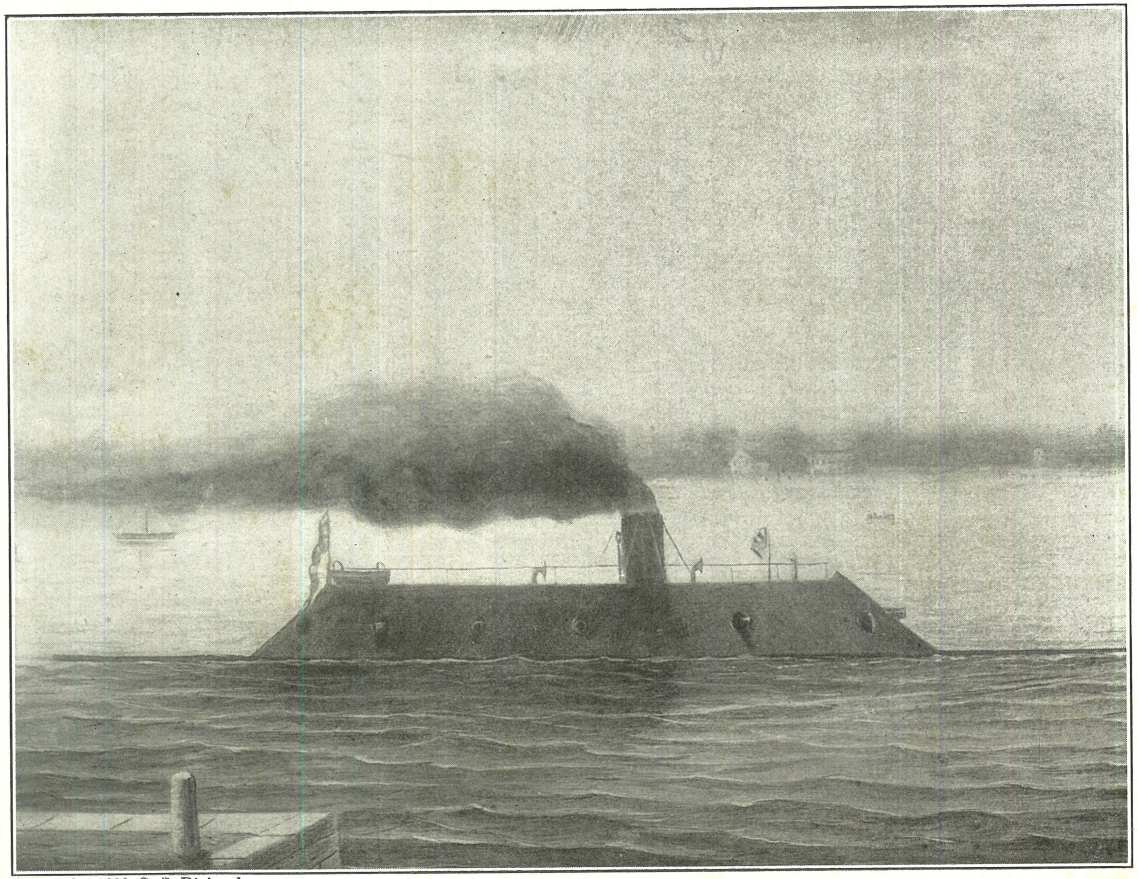
By 4 o'clock we were back in the dry dock at the Navy Yard. The grand old ship was a picture to behold. You could hardly put your hand on a spot on the sides, or smokestack, that had not been battered by the shot of our enemy.

Large improvements to the "Virginia" were made under the supervision of Commodore Tatnall, of Georgia, who had assumed command, owing to the disability of Commodore Buchanan, these improvements consisting of a new wrought iron prow, port covers, etc. When completed, she went down to Old Point and offered battle to the "Monitor" and all the great wooden war-ships of the U. S. Navy, including the "Vanderbilt," which ship had been specially brought forward to accomplish her destruction. We manned, carefully, four small steamers fully equipped to capture the "Monitor" by wedging the turret and securing down the hatches, and while one or more of these boats might have been destroyed, so well was our late antagonist's build then understood had either reached her she would, in my judgment, have been captured. Neither the "Monitor" nor any one of the large ships the U. S. Government had ordered there would come out from under the guns of Fortress Monroe, while one of our steamers, the "Jamestown," was sent in near Hampton and captured three schooners loaded with hay and grain, and brought them safely to Norfolk. After cruising about, in challenge for battle, without having it accepted, the Commodore, showing signs of disgust, ordered a gun fired to the windward, and returned to the buoy off Sewell's Point, and anchored for the night. The next day we came to Norfolk for some repairs to the boiler. A few days thereafter, having completed our repairs, we heard heavy firing, and received orders to go to the aid of our batteries at Sewell's Point that were being bombarded by the "Monitor" and other ships. We were soon under way and steered directly for the "Monitor" and others, then shelling at the Point; but as we approached they ceased firing and retreated below the forts, we following until we exchanged several shots with the Rip Raps. With consider-

able disappointment, Commodore Tatnall ordered the ship back to her buoy at Sewell's Point. The next day, or soon thereafter, we noticed our batteries were not flying our flag, and upon learning the cause we found that Norfolk was being evacuated, thus ending the necessity of holding our present position. The next thing to do was either to go out to sea, which all agreed to do, if permitted, or go up the James River. Positive orders were received to come up to Richmond. Upon consultation with the pilots it was learned that if we could lighten the ship enough to let her draw four or five feet less, we could get over the bar. This action was agreed upon, and all were set to work heaving over the ballast and other articles, in order to bring her up to eighteen feet draught. We learned by 12 o'clock Saturday night that we could not get up the river for some reason, and now being exposed by having some two feet of the wooden hull out of the water, nothing was left but to destroy the ship, in order to keep her from falling into the hands of the enemy. She was then run aground, above Craney Island, and the work of destruction commenced. We had but two boats to land our large crew safely on shore; consequently we had to leave all our personal effects on board the steamer. I was one of ten selected to destroy the ship, and held the candle for Mr. Oliver, the gunner, to uncap the powder in the magazine to insure a quick explosion, and, necessarily, was among the last to leave her decks. A more beautiful sight I never beheld than that great ship on fire, flames issuing from the port-holes, through the gratings and smokestack—the conflagration was a sight ever to be remembered. Thus closed the life, on Saturday night, May 12, 1862, of our gallant ship. Our crew landing Sunday morning, possibly about 4 o'clock, we had to march to Suffolk, arriving that night, having been without food since Saturday noon. We took the train and arrived at Richmond the next day, and were ordered to Drewry's Bluff, and there we prevented the enemy from reaching Richmond, stopping the progress of the entire fleet, including the "Monitor" that had refused to meet the same men when on the decks of the "Virginia" before her destruction. With considerable loss to them, and but little to us, we drove the entire fleet back down the river.

The following minute account of the great combat, by a foreigner and a disinterested witness, should put at rest forever the oft-repeated assertion that the "Monitor" defeated the "Virginia." The French ship was at anchor between Sewell's Point and the Rip Raps. Her commander had a good view of all that transpired, and his plain statements conclusively prove that the "Monitor" did not obtain a victory over the "Virginia."

The commander of the "Gassendi," a French man-of-war, who witnessed the combat, made a report to his government, from which the following are extracts:



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"Virginia" Passing Fort Norfolk, March 8, 1862.

"On the morning of the 8th, light breeze from the N.N.W.; very fine weather; slight ebb tide. About 12:40, a mass, having the appearance of a barrack's roof surmounted by a large funnel, appeared at the entrance of Elizabeth River, a little inside of Sewell's Point. Every one recognized the 'Merrimac' immediately, which, accompanied by two gunboats, the 'Beaufort' and the 'Raleigh,' advanced slowly toward the channel of Hampton Roads. After several evolutions, executed doubtless to assure herself of the good working of her machinery, the 'Merrimac' seemed for an instant to turn back toward Norfolk; but in a short time after she boldly started again on her course at an apparent speed of six knots, standing for the Federal sailing frigates 'Cumberland' and 'Congress,' anchored at the entrance of the James River. The two gunboats remained at the entrance of the Elizabeth River to watch the movement of the Federal vessels anchored off Fortress Monroe.

"The Federal naval force at the anchorage consisted of the screw frigate 'Minnesota,' for more than a month cleared for action, with steam up; of the screw frigate 'Roanoke,' also cleared for action, but which an inexplicable negligence had allowed to remain for four months with her main shaft broken, and which tried to deceive the enemy by a useless blowing off of steam; of the sailing frigate 'St. Lawrence,' which had arrived the day before to replace the 'Cumberland' at Newport News, and which had anchored at quite a distance outside; of two three-masted ships, each armed with six cannon. There were besides four gunboats, paddle-wheel or screw; half a dozen tugboats (each carrying a 30-pounder Parrott), and an equal number of ferry boats. Not one of these vessels appeared to notice the arrival of their formidable enemy in the Roads, and it was more than a quarter of an hour after her appearance that a shot fired by one of the gunboats announced that she was in sight.

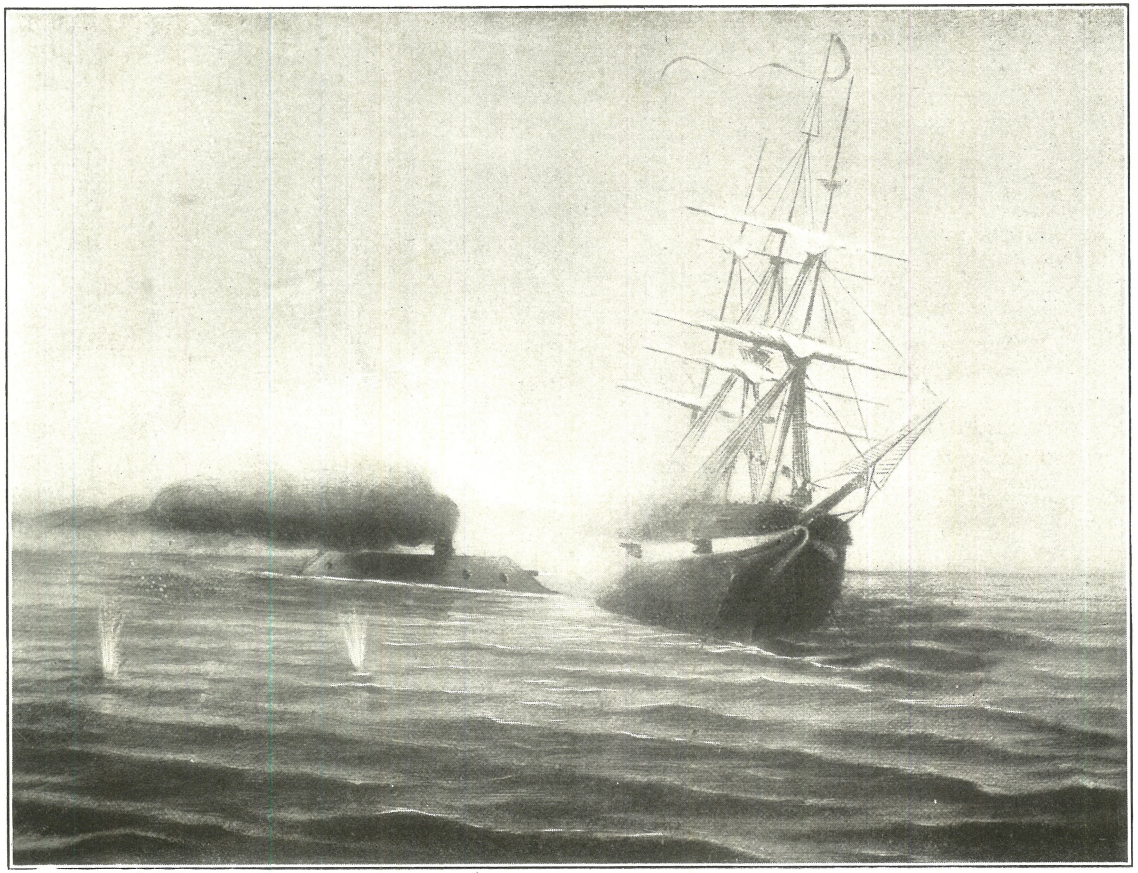
"At about 1:30 the 'Minnesota' hoisted her jib and started at moderate speed, aided by a tugboat towing by the starboard side. The 'Roanoke,' towed by two tugboats, followed her more slowly still. Having arrived near the Rip Raps the 'Minnesota' stopped and ran out lines as though to take the 'Roanoke' in tow; but she soon appeared to relinquish that, and about 2 o'clock she at length started at a speed of seven or eight knots standing toward Newport News, where the engagement took place. Her tugboat (the 'Dragon'), then went to the aid of the 'Roanoke,' which continued to advance slowly, her three tugs being unable without great difficulty to make her stem the current.

"The paddle-wheel gunboat 'Whitehall' and the screw gunboat 'Mystic,' bore off toward Newport News also, but they took a very minor part in the fight. As these vessels came abreast of Sewell's Point battery that battery opened fire on them. They replied to it; but this fire at long range (about 2,500 meters), to which was added that of the Rip Raps, could but produce an insignificant effect.

"About 2:30 the 'Minnesota' ran aground on the shoals north of Hampton Middle Ground, a mile from Newport News. The Southern batteries and gunboats fired upon her at long range. The 'Roanoke,' fearing, doubtless, to take ground also, which her want of speed rendered imminent, then changed her course and, spreading her sails, came back to the anchorage off the Fortress, where she arrived about 4 o'clock. The tugs went to the aid of the 'Minnesota.' The 'Mystic' came back to the anchorage also about the same hour, and the frigate 'St. Lawrence,' which up to that time had steadily proceeded toward the scene of the engagement, imitated likewise the maneuver of the 'Roanoke' and 'Mystic.'

"The 'Merrimac,' however, had continued to direct her course toward the frigates which she wished to destroy. The two gunboats had rejoined her and at 2 o'clock she was at the entrance of the James River. She was immediately greeted by a violent cannonade from the two frigates and from the batteries of Newport News. The Confederate battery at Pig Point replied. The fight was then hidden from us in a great measure by the point, which allowed us to see only the masts of the frigates; but we were able to estimate the force of the fire, which during a quarter of an hour, particularly, was of the hottest. We could see the entrance of the river constantly swept in all directions by the shot that ricochetted, and the strength of the detonations indicated to us that they were guns of the heaviest caliber, which were testing the armor of the 'Merrimac.' This vessel, after having delivered a broadside at the 'Congress,' the nearest of the two frigates, advanced toward the 'Cumberland,' whose formidable battery might well be dreaded, and struck her amidships at a speed of four or five knots, partially breaking her ram. After drawing off two ships' lengths, and having delivered a second broadside at the 'Congress,' the 'Merrimac' a second time rammed the 'Cumberland,' which sank almost immediately. It was then about 2:30. It would seem that this second blow was unnecessary.

"The two steamers, 'Yorktown' and 'Jamestown,' which, having descended the James River, awaited a little higher up the moment of



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"Virginia" Sinking the "Cumberland," March 8, 1862.

attack, after having opened fire upon the 'Congress' in passing, appeared in Hampton Roads and engaged in a very sharp fight with the two Federal gunboats and the stranded 'Minnesota.'

"The 'Merrimac' reappeared also outside the point, fired alternately at the 'Congress' and the batteries of Newport News, while the Southern gunboats did likewise. Toward 3 o'clock that frigate hoisted her jib, sheeted home her topsails, ran forward a ship's length and grounded immediately on the sand banks south of the entrance of the river. Almost at the same instant she struck her colors, which she replaced by a white flag and a little later she hoisted another at the mainmast.

"It was at this time that the following incident occurred, of which the Southern papers complain:

"So soon as the white flag had announced to the Confederates the surrender of the frigate, they ceased firing and one of their gunboats, the 'Raleigh,' approached her and ran alongside of her on the starboard side to take off the officers and to tell the crew to go ashore in their boats; but at the moment that the gunboat in good faith came alongside the frigate, guns fired by the Federals hid in the edge of the woods, and some also from the 'Congress,' killed and wounded many officers and sailors of the 'Raleigh.' Some men, even on the Congress,' were struck by balls coming from the land. This incident, of which the Confederates have bitterly complained, has been copied by the majority of the Northern newspapers; not one has contradicted it. One of them (the *New York Herald,* of the 14th) has, on the contrary, confirmed it.

"The 'Merrimac' continued to fire at the batteries of Newport News up to the moment that the 'Raleigh' drew off from the 'Congress' (about 4 o'clock). All of them drew near to the 'Minnesota' which, still aground and slightly inclined to starboard and surrounded by three or four gunboats, exchanged shots at long range with the 'Yorktown' and 'Jamestown.' The 'Roanoke' was already *en route* for the anchorage. The 'St. Lawrence,' which arrived on the scene of action, took part but for a short time, and everything looked as though the resistance of the 'Minnesota' could not be prolonged.

"However, the shallowness of the water did not permit the 'Merrimac' to draw near to the frigate and the other vessels were of too slight a build to expose themselves near her powerful battery.

"The combatants appeared, besides, exhausted by the emotions and fatigue of a continued struggle of more than three hours. Per-

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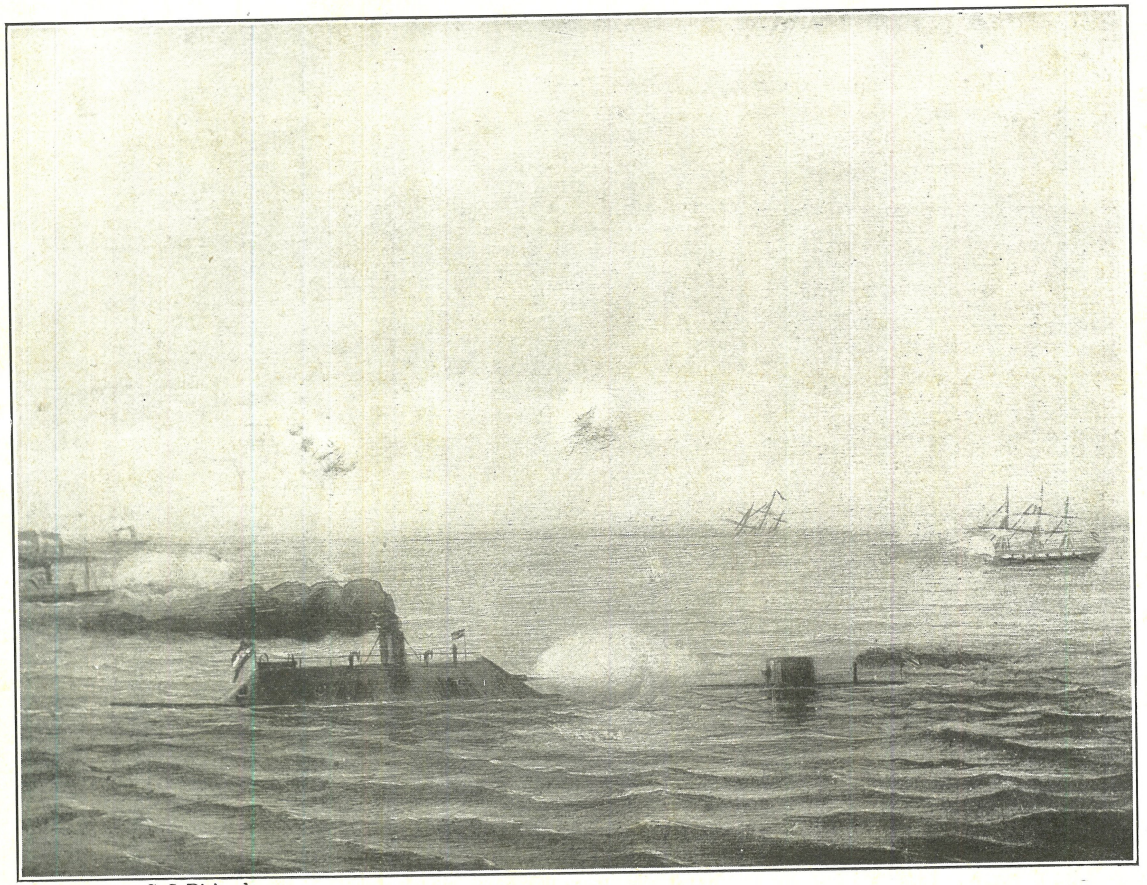
haps the Confederates, almost sure of taking the frigate on the morrow, did not wish to damage the hull nor the machinery too much. However it may be, the fire slackened a great deal. About 6 o'clock it had entirely ceased and the vessels disappeared little by little in the fog which obscured the horizon. At 7:30 the 'Congress' was on fire and blew up at midnight with a tremendous report. The Confederates had succeeded, besides, in cutting out in the James River and taking to Norfolk the water tank 'Reindeer,' which alone supplied the fort and vessels with water.

"Everything seemed desperate on the evening of the 8th, and a general panic appeared to take possession of everyone. The terrible engine of war, so often announced, had at length appeared, and in an hour at most had destroyed two of the strongest ships of the Union, silenced two powerful land batteries and seen the rest of the naval force, which the day before blockaded the two rivers, retreat before her. Several vessels changed their anchorage and all held themselves in readiness to stand out to sea at the first movement of the enemy. Everything was in confusion at Fortress Monroe; ferry boats, gunboats and tugboats were coming and going in all directions; drums and bugles beat and sounded with unusual spirit. Fortress Monroe and the battery of the Rip Raps exchanged night signals without intermission. In spite of the assistance of half a dozen steamers, the 'Minnesota' could not succeed in getting afloat again, and I learned that a council of war held on the subject even entertained for a moment the thought of burning her. Already seven or eight guns had been thrown overboard, and some others spiked, when about 8:40 the 'Monitor' (Ericsson battery) arrived, which was to save the 'Minnesota' and the rest of the vessels at the anchorage.

"The sending of this new auxiliary restored the shaken confidence. She immediately directed her course toward the place where the frigate was stranded and anchored beside her. The Confederate vessels had taken their position under Sewell's Point, and the night passed without incident, each one waiting with impatience the results of the trial of the morrow.

"On the morning of the 9th, slight breeze from the east; very fine weather; light fog.

"At daylight, at the entrance of the Elizabeth River, the Confederate vessels were seen under steam, the 'Minnesota' still unmovable, and to the left of her, scarcely visible, a small black mass, surmounted by a curl of smoke.



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"Virginia" Engaged in Battle with the "Monitor," in Hampton Roads, March 9, 1862.

History of the "Merrimac-Virginia."

"At 8 o'clock the fog completely dispersed. The 'Merrimac,' preceded by the 'Jamestown' and 'Yorktown,' stood for the Federal frigate. The lighter vessels commenced the attack, but the little black mass had put itself in motion and soon a cloud of smoke and the noise of two loud reports apprised the gunboats with whom they had to deal. They were then seen to abandon the attack and retire under the batteries of Sewell's Point, leaving the 'Merrimac' to defend alone the honor of their young flag. The 'Minnesota,' occupied in efforts to get herself afloat, only took part in the fight at long intervals, and the action resolved itself into a veritable duel between two batteries. They engaged in the fight at first at long range, but the two enemies were not slow in coming together, each one striving to find the weak spot in the armor of her adversary. In this contest of naval tactics, entirely in a narrow channel of little depth, the 'Monitor,' whose draft is not half that of the 'Merrimac,' had an enormous advantage over the latter. Sure of her workings she could run at full speed, approach or retire, as she judged best, without fear of running aground. The Confederate battery, on the contrary, could not move nor perform any evolutions except with the greatest precaution, in spite of the evident great skill of her pilot.

"At the commencement of the action she grounded and remained immovable for a quarter of an hour. However, the fight continued with an equal ardor. Several times in their evolutions the two adversaries fired upon each other at a distance of a few meters, and in spite of their powerful batteries the projectiles bounded off perfectly harmless, apparently.

"Once the 'Merrimac' ran into the 'Monitor,' but whether her ram had been completely broken the day before or whether it was placed too high, she struck her enemy at the water-line and produced only a slight depression on the powerful armor plating which protected that part. Shortly after, the flagstaff of the 'Merrimac' was shot away by a ball, and the tops in the Roads, as well as the ramparts of the fortress, saluted this accident with frantic hurrahs as a victory. But soon a sailor appeared on the gratings, showing at the end of a staff the flag which had for an instant disappeared.

"Two or three times the Ericsson battery drew near to the 'Minnesota' and stopped firing to cool her guns. The frigate then fired a broadside at the 'Merrimac,' which replied with energy, and one of her balls struck the boiler of the tugboat 'Dragon,' which, moored alongside of the stranded vessel, held herself in readiness to take her in tow. The boiler exploded, causing the 'Dragon' to sink, scalding and wounding several men.

"At length, about 12:30, after four hours of fighting, the 'Merrimac' started for Sewell's Point.

"The 'Monitor' came up to the 'Minnesota' and a little while after all the Confederate flotilla returned to Norfolk.

"During the following night the stranded frigate was gotten afloat, and at 2 A. M. of the 10th, one of the gunboats, which had taken part in the fight, the 'Whitehall,' took fire and blew up at two cable lengths from the 'Gassendi.' At daylight the 'Minnesota' and the 'Monitor' anchored in the Roads.

"The 'Merrimac' appeared to me to have received 50 tc 60 shot. The funnel was literally riddled, and the flagstaff shot away. None of the shot had made a very serious impression. The first iron plate of the armor, sometimes the second, was broken, but nowhere was the armor penetrated. Owing to the slope of the sides, even when the iron would break under the blow there was no internal bending of the entire structure as nearly always happened to the Ericsson battery. The unbroken plate remained almost intact. However, from the concussion caused by two shots, one at the edge, the other below the water-line, a piece of wood flew off inside, but the vessel did not make water in either case. The sloping arrangement of the separate, and not very wide plates, fastened on the inside by nut-bolts, allowed the 'Merrimac' to be promptly repaired.

"During the morning of the 9th a ball from the 'Monitor' parted her ('Merrimac's') chain a little below the hawse-hole, the anchor dropped and the chain, violently driven inward, seriously wounded a man. A gun was broken at the muzzle. They, nevertheless, continued to fire it without accident.

"It is asserted that at the time of the ramming of the 'Cumberland' a part of her crew leaped on the roofing of the 'Merrimac,' but they slid off the incline plane and the greater part were drowned. It is doubtless to this incident that the disappearance of 200 men from that ship is due.

"The 'Monitor' was hit by 23 projectiles. Some shells were thrown by the 'Minnesota' at the 'Merrimac,' and they produced no more effect than a blow of a hammer. The balls from the 'Merrimac,' especially those fired almost muzzle to muzzle, produced some results. Three cylindro-conical balls fired from the rifle guns made an indentation nearly four inches deep on the armor plating. Two of them made an equally deep indentation on the inside of the turret, and a man leaning against the inside walls at the place receiving the blow

was thrown forward and wounded. A third projectile struck one of the iron plates of the pilot-house and made such a depression that iron splinters were violently thrown off and blinded the captain, who at that moment was leaning his head against the plate. The other shots which reached the 'Monitor,' and were for the most part round, did not appear to me to have produced a very great effect, those especially which struck the sides perpendicularly; two, however, struck the side at the edge of the deck, lifting and tearing it, causing the iron plates to give way and breaking three of them. The others only produced insignificant effects."

Surgeon D. B. Phillips, of the "Virginia," reported the casualties of the 8th as follows:

"Flag-officer F. Buchanan wounded in the left thigh, a minie-ball having passed entirely through the fleshy portion, grazing femoral artery and inflicting a serious wound. Lieut. R. D. Minor wounded in the left side. Midshipman Marmaduke, slight wound on the arm. Killed, Charles Dunbar and ——— Waldeck. Wounded, William Burkes, seaman; John Capps, Company E, 41st Regiment; A. J. Dalton, Company E, 41st Regiment; Emerson Ivas, seaman; and John Leonard, seaman."

The Federal loss in the battles of the 8th and 9th of March was 201 killed and 108 wounded—the Confederate loss, 7 killed and 17 wounded.

On the 8th and 9th of March, 1862, the Confederate States fleet successfully encountered and defeated a force equal to 2,960 men and 220 guns as follows:

"Congress," burned, ...	480 men, 50 guns.
"Cumberland," sunk, ...	360 men, 22 guns.
"Minnesota," riddled, ...	550 men, 40 guns.
"Roanoke," driven off, ...	550 men, 40 guns.
"St. Lawrence," driven off, ...	550 men, 40 guns.
Two or three gunboats, disabled, ...	120 men, 6 guns.
"Monitor," iron-clad, disabled and driven off to shoal water, ...	150 men, 2 guns.
Forts at Newport News silenced, ...	200 men, 20 guns.

Officers of the "Virginia."

Commodore Franklin Buchanan, ... of Maryland.
Lieutenant Catesby Ap. R. Jones, ... of Virginia.
Lieutenant Charles C. Simms, ... of Virginia.
Lieutenant Robert D. Minor, ... of Virginia.
Lieutenant Hunter Davidson, ... of Virginia.
Lieutenant John Taylor Wood, ... of Louisiana.
Lieutenant J. R. Eggleston, ... of Mississippi.
Lieutenant Walter R. Butt, ... of Portsmouth, Va.
Midshipman R. C. Foute, ... of Tennessee.
Midshipman H. H. Marmaduke, ... of Missouri.
Midshipman H. B. Littlepage, ... of Virginia.
Midshipman W. J. Craig, ... of Kentucky.
Midshipman J. C. Long, ... of Tennessee.
Midshipman L. M. Roots, ... of Virginia.
Paymaster, James Semple, ... of Virginia.
Surgeon, D. B. Phillips, ... of Virginia.
Assistant Surgeon, A. S. Garnett, ... of Virginia.
Captain of Marines, R. T. Thom, ... of Alabama.
Chief Engineer, H. Ashton Ramsey, ... of Virginia.
Assistant Engineer, John W. Tynan, ... of Virginia.
Assistant Engineer, Louden Campbell, . . . of Virginia.
Assistant Engineer, Benjamin Herring, . . . of North Carolina.
Assistant Engineer, E. A. Jack, ... of Virginia.
Assistant Engineer, E. V. White, of Georgia, now of Portsmouth, Va.
Boatswain, ... Charles H. Hasker.
Gunner, ... C. B. Oliver.
Carpenter, ... Hugh Lindsay.
Clerk, ... Arthur Sinclair, Jr.
Volunteer Aid, ... Douglas F. Forrest.
Captain, ... Thomas Kevill, United Artillery.
Acting Master, ... William Parrish.
Pilot, ... William Clarke.
Pilot, ... Hezekiah Williams.
Pilot, ... George Wright.
Pilot, ... Thomas Cunningham.
Sergeant Tabb, Signal Corps.

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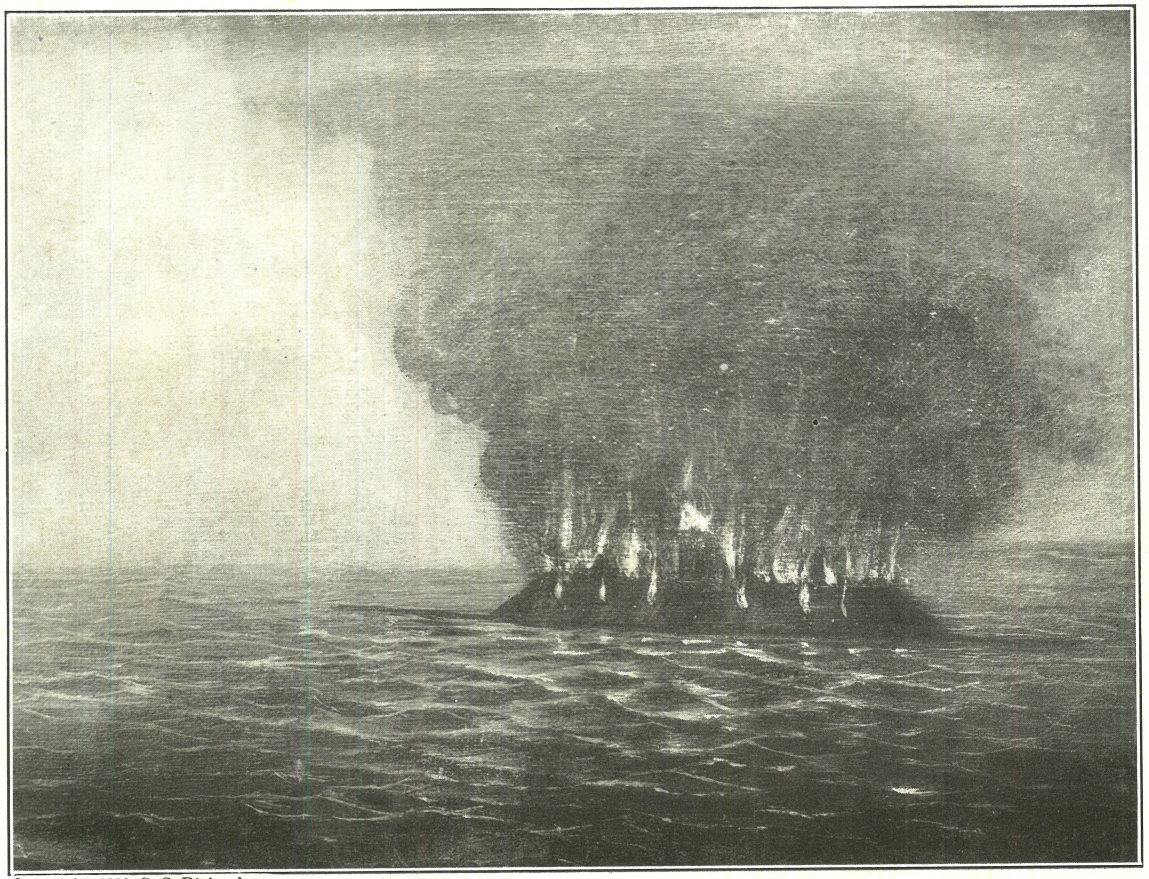

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Destruction of the "Virginia," May 11, 1862.

Reflections.

I may with propriety close my simple description of the two days' battle of the "Virginia," with a few reflections suggested by the events that we have reviewed.

Thoughtful people of the South have always claimed for that section superiority in the study, mastery and application of the principles and problems that are involved in our complex system of government, but they have very generally conceded to their Eastern and Northern brethren precedence in the scientific studies underlying inventions and mechanical pursuits, and in the creation of manufactured utilities. This precedence was so generally conceded to the North that the impression obtained largely in each section of the country that the people of the South lacked both the disposition and the capacity for the scientific studies and their application to inventive and practical mechanical purposes.

The popular mind was speedily disabused of this impression by the response that the people of the Southern States made to the unprecedented demands of war upon their inventive forces and their mechanical skill. Lacking machinery and the ordinary agencies of production, they put their fruitful minds and skillful hands to the raw material available, created machinery and constructed ships and batteries, and manufactured arms and produced all the conditions for maintaining and handling large and effective armies, as though my magic.

Their mechanical genius and inventive skill were specially exhibited in the opportunity supplied when the Federal authorities so suddenly, and in my judgment so needlessly, abandoned the Portsmouth Navy Yard, with its rich equipment of machinery and material. Under these conditions, out of the burnt "Merrimac" was created the iron-clad "Virginia"—a ship that not only fought a great historic battle, but wrought a revolution in the construction of war-ships throughout the world, and supplied, practically, the model upon which the iron-clads of all nations are built. Not the "Monitor," but the "Virginia" suggested the central idea of the modern cruiser and modern battleship.

Another reflection is pertinent here. This occasion supplies an opportunity by which we may learn the compensative side of even internecine strife. Antedating the Civil War there grew up an intense prejudice between the people of the two sections. It was a growth of almost a century, and settled into a positive and bitter animosity. These unfriendly feelings found expression in the grandest fighting and most desperate courage on

each side. To the superficial observer the wounds inflicted would never be healed and the gulf of separation never bridged. This conclusion, however, was hasty and erroneous, because there were in the characters and the tempers of the parties latent forces of wonderfully mollifying and curative power. The people, North and South, were honest in their convictions, patriotic in their motives, and both were unquestionably courageous.

Harmony and peace—friendship—between such combatants demanded simply that they should know each other. The shock of battle taught them the mettle of which each was made, more thoroughly in four years than the touch of commerce and trade had taught them in a century, and they came out of the strife with more mutual respect and confidence than had existed between them in any period of their history. And to-day the union of hearts and States is more complete than at any time in our national life.

In the light of such conclusions as these, and in harmony with such a spirit as I have suggested, I have attempted to give you a description of the fight between the "Virginia" and the fleet of the United States in Hampton Roads in 1862.

STATEMENT OF AUTHOR.

I am fully convinced the arrival of the Monitor at Old Point Saturday night, March 8th, 1862, was decidedly fortunate for the United States Government, in that it saved further destruction of the Federal fleet, and possibly the evacuation of Old Point, and certainly kept the Merrimac-Virginia from leaving Hampton Roads, as it became necessary for her to remain as a protector from this ship to our cities and the James River, which could have been attacked by her in the absence of the Virginia. But as to the Monitor withdrawing from the fight and seeking safety in shallow water, owing to her light draft, and forever thereafter refusing battle, I can show positive evidence sustaining this point, which is now in my possession, from the very best authority.

I would also add that under the supervision on Hon. John L. Porter, of Portsmouth, Virginia, who was the Chief Naval Constructor of the Confederate States Navy, the Merrimac was converted into the ironclad "Virginia" at the Portsmouth, Va., Navy Yard.